RESEARCH IN MANAGEMENT LEARNING & EDUCATION

unConference

2026 Research in Management Learning and Education (RMLE) Unconference

University of Warwick
at its campus in Venice, Italy

PRE-EVENT PROCEEDINGS

Note: Included QIC document contributions were accepted based on a double-blind peer review process.

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Overview

Research discussions shouldn't have to rise from the ashes of recycled rhetoric and boring presentations prepared months in advance. Interactions about research should be exciting, organic, and engaging. For those who are interested in being generators of innovative, cutting-edge research in management education or those who have questions related to research in management education that are not addressed through traditional conference or workshop forums our 2026 Research in Management Learning & Education (RMLE) Unconference was the place to be.

Unlike traditional conference formats that involve fixed agendas, established streams, and planned presentations, our RMLE Unconferences are organic and participant driven. The fundamental goal of each RMLE Unconference is to bring together interested, passionate, and knowledgeable people to create a forum where they can share, learn, engage, question, contribute, discuss and debate about issues they deem to be important. Each participant is a contributor and all interactions take place in a flexible and highly interactive format (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference for more information). That is exactly what happened during this event.

During the 2026 RMLE Unconference held in partnership with the University of Warwick, we achieved the following:

- Sharing ideas about key research areas participants are interested in,
- Finding answers and "paths forward" regarding current research questions or concerns,
- Learning from others about their experiences with research project design, development and publication processes,
- Considering issues that are emerging through recent research and publication,
- Meeting and networking in an intimate and informal setting with other faculty members interested in management education research, and
- Interacting with current and former board members and/or editors of the *Journal of Management Education* (JME)*, Management Learning* (ML), and the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (AMLE).

Participant Contributors

We were a group of 41 highly engaging (and engaged) people representing 22 universities, ten countries, and three continents. The countries represented by our contributors include Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

The tertiary institutions and organizations represented included King's Business School - King's College, Nottingham Trent University, Bond University, Copenhagen Business School, Deree – The American College of Greece, University of Calgary, BPP Business School - BPP University, American University of Beirut Mediterraneo, Alliance Manchester Business School, Notre Dame, Northumbria University, The University of Warwick, Henley Business School, University of Portsmouth, Corvinus University of Budapest, Lancaster University, University of Queensland, IÉSEG School of Management, Ukrainian Catholic University, University of Leeds, Liverpool John Moores University, and University of Bath.

Scope and Discussion Groups for This Year's Event

In terms of scope, the domain for this RMLE Unconference was the same as the eleven previous events which included management teaching, learning, education, and the contexts within which these occur. As a result, the included submissions focused on a diversity of issues related to the business of management education (whether that was in universities, consulting agencies, or other organizations) as well as the processes and outcomes of management education.

The submissions included in these proceedings are called "Questions, Ideas, and Concerns" (QIC) documents. The QICs were written as free-flowing thoughts which encapsulate any questions, ideas, and concerns participants have with respect to research in management education. The content of this year's QICs was varied and rich, resulting in the following initial discussion group clusters. These assigned groups apply to our first discussion session only, after that we encouraged participants to electively and organically shift/morph/adapt the groups based on their experiences and what was shared during the reporting back sessions. As expected, through the course of a few discussion rounds, new idea- and project-specific discussion groups were formed. As always, our group names were reflective of the country we gathered in with respect to a few of the diverse innovations that have their home there.

The initial discussion group clusters for this year's event were:

- Group “Radio” - Metaphors for connection, community, and engagement in management learning and education
- Group “The Newspaper” - Learning through reflection, imagination, and exploration in academia
- Group “Moka Pot” - Embracing care, kindness, and inclusion in academia
- Group “Eyeglasses” - Digital learning and AI in management education
- Group “Barometer” - Reimagining classrooms
- Group “Typewriter” - Learning to question, doubt, and embrace irritation
- Group “Gelato” - Exploring what it means to live with hope within war
- Group “University” - Navigating engagement in its many forms

Event (Un)Structure

As this was an Unconference, there were only two formal presentations - a welcome and a summary – each facilitated by members of the conference chair group listed above (see the “Unconference (Un)schedule” at the end of this document). The minimalist formality of the event’s structure is based on its underlying ethos. The bulk of the RMLE Unconference is designed to be 100% driven by the people who are there. Beyond reading the QICs in this document, the only preparation that was asked of participants prior to the Unconference was to bring energy and enthusiasm, a collaborative mindset, and an open-mindedness to going wherever our time together took us. Unconferences are uncomplicated. They are about knowledge generation via a minimally-structured, highly-engaging, and participant-driven format. The outcomes speak for themselves.

Expected Outcomes

The outcomes from any Unconference are various in nature and organic in terms of growth. The 2026 RMLE Unconference was no exception. Following our time together, we look forward to hearing from you as you navigate forward with your initiatives and projects with the knowledge, passion, and excitement generated during this event.

A Special Thank You

As with every RMLE Unconference, we would like to thank our ongoing partner organizations, the *Journal of Management Education*, *Management Learning*, and the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, as well as Bond University and the incredible team members of our RMLE Unconference Executive Committee. This year, we would also like to send a special thank you to the team from the University of Warwick – Warwick Business School (thank you Ashley Roberts and the team from Warwick’s Venice Center) for helping to organise this year’s activities. Without our institutional and individual supporters, as well as our engaging and engaged participant contributors, our RMLE Unconferences wouldn’t exist.

Attached Documents

1. Unconference (Un)schedule (pp.64-65)

Group “Radio”

Embracing metaphors for connection, community, and engagement

Tony
Peggy
Brent
Mátyás
Elena
Chara
Anthi

Fun Fact: The radio, which revolutionized communication and entertainment, enabled us to listen to news, music, and stories from around the globe. Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi is credited with the invention of the radio in the late 19th century. He transmitted the first transatlantic radio signal on December 12, 1901, marking a pivotal moment in history and laying the foundation for modern radio broadcasting. Marconi, who was born in the northern Italy town of Bologna, won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1909. He shared the prize with Karl Ferdinand Braun, a German physicist, “in recognition of their contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy.” See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

The Rights of the River and the Drought in Management Education

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In 2025, the *RMLE Unconference* was partly convened floating along the River Mersey as an intentional strategy to promote reflection and connection on one of our longest-established natural resources. In 2026, we find ourselves once again on water, floating along the Venetian Lagoon. Both the River Mersey and the Venetian Lagoon have been dated at 7000 years old, which means they pre-date the deities in Roman mythology often associated with water (including Neptune, Salacia, and the Lymphae, 3000 years ago). It is not surprising that their life forms part of the cultural and entrepreneurial fabric of their respective locales and populations. What is surprising, despite water's centrality to life and trade, is the ongoing abuse of water and waterways in society, so much so that some countries have instituted *The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers* (see https://www.rightsofrivers.org/). The declaration states that rivers have:

1. THE RIGHT TO FLOW,
2. THE RIGHT TO PERFORM ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS WITHIN ITS ECOSYSTEM,
3. THE RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM POLLUTION,
4. THE RIGHT TO FEED AND BE FED BY SUSTAINABLE AQUIFERS,
5. THE RIGHT TO NATIVE BIODIVERSITY, AND
6. THE RIGHT TO REGENERATION AND RESTORATION (*original capitalisation*).

Why do we need to be so explicit about the rights of rivers, when they are so prevalent in our history? Scholarship proposes that *nature* has become so *naturalised*, that we have become 'blind' to it (cf. Wandersee and Schussler, 1999). This notion, whilst emanating from biology education, has now extended to management learning and education (Thomas et al, 2021; Sanders et al, 2025). I want to extend this critical ambition in line with calls to rebalance gaze, metaphor, and language in management education (Audebrand, 2010; Edwards and Küpers, 2024), especially as we learn more about the role of localised knowledge and wisdom within curricula and for students to 'remember' the heritage of a place and people (Joseph, 2018; Kgope, 2023). As such, I want to nurture a QIC around the mysterious lack of water and waterways in contemporary management education (and management and organisation studies more generally).

Essentially, this QIC involves exploring:

- Why do we have such a drought in management education?
- What droplets might we sprinkle to nourish water-awareness?
- Or, perhaps more aptly, how might we open the flood gates to quickly rehydrate?

Within management learning and education, these QICs reorient and reexamine *what* we teach (e.g. examples and cases about water and waterways in management learning and education classrooms) but also *how* we teach (e.g. where water and waterways become the management learning and education classrooms). While the *what* may be the most straightforward, I am curious to explore how water and waterways can become the *vehicle* for management learning and education.

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Could CREEPing quantitative course decisions help develop responsible leaders?

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In our RMLE 2024 QIC we raised the idea "one percent for reflection" as a pedagogical approach that could embed responsible thinking practice into the 'muscle memory' of all business students. At RMLE 2024 our group reflected on grand challenges facing the world, explored the values embedded in the various disciplines and fields we teach, and pondered the tensions between our organizational, discipline, and personal goals and values. We would now like to discuss how such responsible reflection 'muscle memory' could be operationalized in all management education courses without making it a big ask for faculty or students.

When one reviews business school curriculums, there is often more than 50% of that could be classified as quantitative courses or content. Faculty teaching quantitative content typically train students to mathematically determine the optimal decision, often based on short-term measures such as profit. Could a brief reflective model that asks students to 'creep a little further' and consider the potential implications of a decision on their personal wellness, society, and the environment be developed and repeatedly used in quantitative business courses like Finance, Accounting, Operations, and Analytics during a student's degree?

The PRME i5 Playbook promotes opportunities for student reflection, however, operationalizing the descriptions of when and where to promote reflection can be challenging for quantitative focused faculty who are curriculum driven (by their institution or by choice). Further, many quantitative faculty members simply feel out of their element asking students to critically reflect by exploring their assumptions and biases. This lack of comfort could be a combination of factors including lack of training in critical reflection, concern about how to deescalate a conversation, feeling disingenuous (e.g. I am teaching you about reducing costs, not about the social and environmental impact of doing that), there is simply no time, etc. It should not be a surprise when quantitative faculty "stick to what the numbers say" in their teachings, however such actions indirectly work against PRME's mission to develop responsible-decision makers. If an established and proven reflective model that can be quickly appended to optimization scenarios existed, it could help transform quantitative management education to work towards developing responsible decision makers who graduate with 'muscle memory' of such reflective practices.

We are curious about some of the various responsible reflection models or frameworks that our Organizational Behaviour and Strategy colleagues employ in their classes, and if adaptations for quick and easy usage in quantitative courses are even possible.

As quantitative faculty members, we are envisioning a structure that would have students "creep their decision" by going just a little further after calculation the numbers. Perhaps CREEP could actually be acronym that includes Critical Reflection on Ethical (social), Environmental, and Personal wellness. Could Indigenous based components also be included? We are eager to discuss, learn, brainstorm, and collaborate on ways that the many quantitative courses in management education could aid the development of responsible managers who graduate with a critically reflective framework in their decision making 'muscle memory'.

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Birthing Change: A Socratic Midwifery of Organisational Transformation

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The tragic inefficacy of organisational change initiatives is a familiar anecdote in both management education and corporate corridors. As a scholar-practitioner who mainly facilitates and advises on change processes in organisational practice, but also teaches change management in university settings, I speak from within the oft-cited implementation gap. Yet a recent, deeply personal experience turned my whole way of thinking about change management upside down.

Through a guided movement-based experience simulating stages of birth, I viscerally re-experienced conception, gestation, and birth. One birth was induced early because the obstetrician wanted to go skiing. A corporate transition is rushed because the sponsor's bonus depends on it. Stories familiar to many. The embodied encounter evoked an unsettling but generative metaphor in me: Might *some* organisational change efforts resemble problematic births?

Although firms have long been described through life-cycle analogies (Penrose, 1952), and organisational issues have been likened to human pathologies (Faghih et al., 2017), managerial change metaphors conspicuously omit conception, gestation, and parturition (Smollan, 2014). The dominant managerial discourse, echoing Kotter (1995), still calls first for urgency, contractions before conception, and rushing to induce labour. By starting with 'birth', organisational prenatal dynamics are entirely unexamined**.**

But what if the real labour of change often begins long before, in the fragile moment of implantation into organisational culture, or even at the subtle emergence of a shared collective desire for change? How many change efforts fail not at the final pushes, but in the early stages, never properly embedding or taking root in the host body of the organisation?

Organisational transformations, like birth, might begin with the spark of a vision, take root through cultural embedding, grow quietly through alignment and capability-building, erupt into a visible rollout, and live or die in the moments after, when integration and consolidation matter most.
I argue that conception and pregnancy can serve as powerful generative metaphors (Schön, 1971) for understanding and reframing organisational change processes, by provoking difficult yet vital questions:

- What specific types of organisational change are best captured by the birth analogy, and which are not? Why?
- What lessons can be drawn from this metaphor without reducing complex organisational dynamics to biological analogies, essentialising gender roles, or risking insensitivity?
- If organisational culture is a womb, what sustains or threatens gestation? The idea that the maternal immune system must 'weaken' for pregnancy to succeed has been disproven (Mor et al. 2011). Instead, successful implantation depends on immune modulation: a careful, responsive balancing act. What if organisational change worked the same way, not by shutting down resistance, but by engaging it wisely?
- Experienced change agents often focus more on the relational and processual aspects of change than on outcomes, and tend to provide more support than described in standard models, favouring proactive engagement over reactive, top-down interventions (Phillips & Klein, 2023). If these midwives and doulas, and not surgeons, are those best positioned to steward non-vulnerable transitions, why do we still masculinise change leadership with a language of control and urgency?
- What healthy roles can male change agents play in bringing about change?
- How might the 'golden hour' after the birth of change, where bonding and consolidation occur, be better honoured?

Here, I position myself as a Socratic midwife of questions, not answers. I feel compelled (by my daimon) to ask: *What if change were not driven, but born?*

Can we reconceive change education not as a heroic accomplishment, but as patient delivery and accompaniment?

In this spirit, I ask not to resolve, but to midwife our own thinking about this subject.

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Flourishing Through a 'Festival of Learning':
Paideia for Engaged Citizenship as a Mark of Leadership for Systemic Change

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As part of its mission to cultivate "free minds that flourish," the American University of Beirut Mediterraneo launched the 'Festival of Learning' (FoL) as a curricular innovation designed to celebrate learning as a foundation for flourishing, engaged citizenship, and systemic change. This initiative reflects the University's commitment to Liberal Arts education founded on *paideia*, an educational tradition rooted in the Ancient Greek polis, which emphasizes cultivating human potential, character, and social responsibility.

By situating the FoL within this context, it aims to dissolve traditional boundaries between faculty and students by engaging all participants as co-creators of knowledge. Accordingly, the FoL is designed not merely as an event, but as an integral part of liberal arts education, reinforcing connections across disciplines and foregrounding learning as a systemic process that leverages diverse resources, including digital technologies, in service of human flourishing.

Held during the final week of the academic year, the FoL typically spans two days and invites learners to showcase their knowledge, creativity, and social engagement voluntarily. Contributions are organized into three thematic strands:

1. **Learning Minds** – course-related outputs, such as research projects or assignments, re-contextualized for public sharing.
2. **Creative Minds** – artistic or individual expressions (visual arts, performances, creative writing, installations) reflecting on flourishing.
3. **Inspiring Minds** – talks delivered by external speakers, offering broader perspectives on learning and flourishing.

The showcase formats are intentionally diverse, ranging from oral presentations and posters to artistic installations and performances. By elevating learning beyond conventional assessment, the FoL emphasizes its transformative impact on individuals and communities, reinforcing the ethos that learning is not simply instrumental but central to cultivating humanity and the common good.

If accepted, the QIC proposed will provide the opportunity to explore the following questions and concerns with other management educators at the Unconference:

1. **Is learning a cause, consequence, or context of flourishing?**

Empirical insights from the FoL highlight learners' evolving understandings of flourishing. Rather than being limited to classical notions of the "good life" or individual achievement, flourishing here is viewed as a higher-order 'good' tied to relationships, character, engagement, meaning, and systemic contributions to society. This conception resonates with contemporary frameworks that situate flourishing within broader social and ecological contexts. Importantly, the 'Festival' itself becomes a site where flourishing is not only theorized but also enacted through collaborative, creative, and reflexive practices.

2. Does a 'Festival of Learning' respond to the challenge of 'learnification'?

Learnification as originally conceived by Biesta (2009) is the process where the individualization of learning also leads to its normativization prompting further questions if 'all learning is good and that learning will always bring about more good" (Isacsson, 2007: 113; Papastephanou & Drousioti, 2024). By embedding the FoL into the curriculum, AUB Mediterraneo advances an innovative mode of leadership learning as civic engagement. The initiative further examines if a focus on flourishing invites a celebration of learning, positioning learning as a shared responsibility and a collective achievement. It also invites advancing further responsibilization as integral to flourishing, learning and their relationship.

Group “The Newspaper”

Learning through reflection, imagination, and exploration in academia

Sarah W.
Kate
Laura
Danielle
Eleanor
Natasha

Fun Fact: The newspaper has been instrumental in spreading information, forming public opinion, and holding power accountable. Italy’s role in this arena dates back to the publication of the Gazette of Venice in 1566, often considered the first newspaper published regularly. This 16th-century Venetian innovation allowed news to be shared widely and efficiently, paving the way for modern journalism and the free press we know today. See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Small Stands and Speculative Worlds: Finding Joy in the Cracks of What Is

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What if the future isn't something we wait for, but something we practice? What if, within the frameworks that constrain us, we could find small spaces to cultivate joy, hope, and resistance as daily acts of world-making?

My concern is that even the most well-intentioned innovations in management education often leave untouched the deeper logics of extraction, competition, and performativity. And yet, I believe there are cracks, what Anna Tsing (2015) might describe as life flourishing within the ruins of progress. Our classrooms, as much as they are entangled in institutional demands and market metrics, are also full of such cracks. These are the spaces where we make our small stands.

I'm thinking of the moment when a student's eyes light up not because they've mastered a concept, but because they've glimpsed a world they want to help create. Or when the rhythm of a session shifts, not into chaos, but into collective surprise. These are the moments when creative exercises become acts of speculative experimentation.

If Tsing helps me notice the cracks, Le Guin helps me imagine what might emerge from them. I draw on her understanding of speculative fiction as a form of *social rehearsal*, a way of exercising the imaginative muscles needed for collective transformation. Le Guin insisted that imagination is not escapism but essential work. Her novels offer blueprints for organising around cooperation rather than domination, and ecological balance rather than extraction.

Her essay, *"The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (Le Guin, 1986),* continues to shape how I think about pedagogy: as the gathering of fragments, voices, and partial knowings, rather than a heroic journey to mastery. We offer a container for care, slowness, and shared sense-making. This is the necessary classroom.

Bringing this sensibility into management education means treating our classrooms as laboratories for imagining otherwise. How might storytelling and world-building exercises help students practise thinking beyond the logics of competition? What would it mean to centre gathering and nurturing in our pedagogies, not as content, but as method?

This is the heart of my pedagogical approach, which I call *Futuring Otherwise*: a context-responsive, arts-based method for cultivating anticipatory agency in responsible management education. Rooted in a broader philosophy of *Teaching Otherwise*—a feminist, arts-informed stance that foregrounds care, criticality, and collective imagination—this framework resists the instrumentalisation of futures by centring care, creativity, and plural ways of knowing. It invites both students and educators to engage in world-making—to practise the futures they want to live into—and to recognise that this practice begins in the present.

This work also requires, as Donna Haraway reminds us, that we *"stay with the trouble"* (2016). Haraway teaches that hope is not the expectation of progress, but the commitment to act meaningfully within conditions of uncertainty. In the classroom, this means holding space for students to feel both the weight of our intersecting crises and the possibility of response.

So, the questions I carry are these:

- How might we practice speculative world-building within the constraints of existing frameworks?
- What would it look like to design learning experiences where students imagine organisations rooted in care, creativity, and ecological flourishing?
- How can we create pedagogical moments where joy becomes a glimpse of the possible?
- What does it mean to sustain hope in teaching as a kind of resistant joy?
-

I'm interested in sustainability as a way of sustaining hope itself. How might our small stands become part of a larger practice of world-making?

We may never see the futures we imagine with our students. Yet if we are to survive, let alone flourish, we must teach as though they are possible.

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"*You need to see it to be it*"
Bringing practice back into management education

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Graduate employability is a core priority of higher education, and of management education especially. Government policy and societal expectations have placed pressure upon institutions to not only produce academically qualified graduates but to ensure they develop competencies to be 'future ready'.

Conventionally, employability was of little concern. Management was a practice-based craft. Management education was postgraduate study: practicing managers supported in their learning by (ex-)practitioners rather than research-qualified academics (Louw, 2019). Later, business and management programmes emerging for the undergraduate market were sandwich programmes. Students would complete an internship within a company or set up and run their own enterprise. Recently, financial and social pressures facing students have caused significant decline in sandwich programme enrolment, despite substantive benefits of enhancing final year academic performance and graduate career success (Dalrymple et al., 2021). Internship uptake is particularly low for students from socially disadvantaged and minority backgrounds (HESA, 2024) potentially accentuating attainment gaps. Where internships do remain within programmes, they are typically poorly integrated, rarely supporting students to really capitalise on their learning. Accordingly, many institutions (my own included) have invested significantly in curriculum-based experiential learning to support students' 'work-ready' skills, knowledge and behaviours development.

However, I argue that we are largely missing the point when it comes to meeting employability aspirations for our undergraduates. Being employable isn't about meeting a crude measure of acquiring subject knowledge and employer-desired competencies. To be employable, to 'be' a future professional, necessitates these students' identity shift: from student to professional (Brown, 2022; Warhurst, 2016). But initiating such identity shift necessitates students to 'see' what it means to be a workplace professional and, in turn, to assume this identity: "if you cannot see it, you cannot be it". With the majority of Business School academics now research-focused career academics rather than ex-practitioner academics, opportunities for students to cultivate their occupational identity are constrained risking them retaining the more limiting student identity (Black et al., 2025). "To see it" and in turn "to be it" necessitates students working with (ex-)practitioners. But how can this be achieved? Should we be pursuing curriculum-based academic-led experiential learning or should we be investing in alternative identity-focused activity?

We have set up a Practitioner Partner scheme. Undergraduate module tutors are encouraged to partner with a practitioner who contributes directly to the module, for example, through leading sessions, supporting curriculum development, 'translating' the assessment to demonstrate its workplace relevance and thus expand its meaning for our students. However, the success of this approach for supporting students' identity shift has, to date, been limited.

Where increasing financial constraints are facing students and their institutions, what could effective identity-focused activities look like? How and where would they be embedded within students' university experience? (How) Can we co-create these activities with our students?

I look forward to discussing this wicked problem.

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The Educator's Dilemma: Facilitating Critical Consciousness While Meeting Industry Demands

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As management educators, we find ourselves caught in an increasingly complex tension. On one hand, we're called to develop students as critical thinkers who can question systems, challenge assumptions, and drive positive change in organisations and society. On the other hand, we face relentless pressure to ensure our graduates are "industry-ready" – equipped with the technical skills and practical knowledge that employers demand.

This dilemma has become particularly acute in my praxis-based approach to marketing education. When I encourage students to critically examine corporate greenwashing, question power dynamics in consumer relationships, or challenge data-driven personalisation ethics, I'm simultaneously preparing them for industries where they'll navigate these complex ethical territories. How do we reconcile developing critical consciousness about marketing practices whilst preparing students for professional contexts that may not reward such questioning?

Pressure comes from multiple directions: accreditation bodies emphasise "industry relevance" and employment outcomes; debt-laden students prioritise immediately marketable skills; employers complain about "skills gaps" whilst expecting graduates who can "hit the ground running"; meanwhile, we're expected to address sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility – creating graduates who are both system-ready and system-critical.

This raises several pressing questions I've been unable to resolve through traditional academic forums:

How do we prepare students for industries we're simultaneously teaching them to critique? When developing critical consciousness about corporate practices, are we potentially disadvantaging graduates in job markets that reward compliance over challenge?

What does "employability" actually mean? Whilst employers frequently cite critical thinking as a valued skill, do they mean the kind of critical consciousness that questions fundamental assumptions about marketing's role in society? Could the deeper capabilities we develop through praxis-based approaches - ethical reasoning, sociocultural awareness, and transformative change-making - actually be the most valuable long-term employability skills, even if they don't align with immediate industry expectations?

How do we navigate institutional pressures whilst maintaining pedagogical integrity? When university metrics focus on employment rates and employer satisfaction, how do we justify approaches that might initially complicate rather than streamline the education-to-employment transition?

Can we reframe the relationship between critical education and industry demands? Rather than opposing forces, might there be ways to demonstrate that critically conscious graduates are exactly what progressive organisations need to navigate contemporary challenges around sustainability, digital ethics, and social responsibility?

I'm particularly interested in exploring how other management educators across disciplines experience these tensions. Do finance educators face similar dilemmas teaching sustainable investing versus profit maximisation? How do strategy educators balance systems thinking with competitive advantage frameworks? What practical strategies have colleagues developed for maintaining critical pedagogical approaches whilst satisfying institutional and industry expectations?

Rather than seeking definitive answers, I'm hoping to engage with others sharing these concerns to explore how we might collectively reimagine the relationship between critical management education and employability in ways that serve both our students and society more effectively.

Practitioner-Led Engagement in MSc Management Education: Evidence and Open Questions

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As 'pracademics' teaching in MSc Management programmes, we observe that storytelling from real world experience captures students' attention, with feedback frequently describing such sessions as "inspiring." This intersection of theoretical knowledge and lived experience highlights a vital yet underexplored space in business education, particularly how practitioner input enhances student learning, confidence, and engagement.

Early studies, such as Sukor (2011), noted that guest lecturers improved students' perceived job readiness. More recently, Machost and Stains (2023) argue that reflective educators, particularly those with real world experience, are more responsive to diverse student needs and foster deeper engagement. In our teaching context, practitioner led sessions are frequently reported by students as more memorable, relatable, and valuable than traditional lectures. Contemporary evidence supports these observations. Teacher competency, classroom environment, and institutional resources are significant predictors of student engagement and academic performance (Hanaysha et al., 2023). Similarly, academic self-efficacy often reinforced through practitioner modelling, has a known mediating effect on achievement (Meng and Zhang, 2023). Authentic narratives also contribute to students' confidence and application of knowledge, aligning with Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985), where competence and relatedness are central to fostering intrinsic motivation. Practitioner storytelling draws on narrative learning principles, emotional engagement, and memory consolidation (Medina, 2008; Tyng et al., 2017). These sessions activate multiple dimensions of engagement (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) and can rival, or even surpass, the immersive potential of digital tools (Yaseen et al., 2025). The SCARF framework (Rock and Schwartz, 2008) further explains how practitioner led sessions naturally fulfil students' psychological needs for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness, creating optimal conditions for learning.

Despite these benefits, critical questions remain. First, **which practitioner attributes most strongly influence learning and engagement in postgraduate business education?** Variables such as communication style, contextual alignment, and authenticity may play a role, but systematic investigation is needed. Second, **what is the relative efficacy of digital versus face-to-face practitioner integration?** In the evolving landscape of hybrid and remote learning, it is essential to understand how emotional resonance, presence, and narrative depth translate across delivery modes (Nguyen Viet and Nguyen Viet, 2025). These questions are not only academically relevant but practically urgent. As business schools seek to enhance experiential learning, practitioner involvement must move beyond informal guest lectures. Institutions should invest in structured, evidence informed models for integrating lived experience into curriculum design and delivery. Assessment strategies should also evolve to capture not just knowledge acquisition, but students' ability to apply learning in realistic contexts. In summary, practitioner led teaching fosters connection, relevance, and confidence in learners. With deeper research and institutional support, it can become a defining pillar of transformative management education.

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Practitioner voices: central or peripheral?

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We know that students value and appreciate hearing from practitioners (Jablon-Roberts and McCracken, 2022, Shane, 2002), for example, through guest lectures, engagement with case studies, or resources such a TedTalks or YouTube videos. For many years now, there have also been calls for greater appreciation and wider exploration of the role that "pracademics" (Volpe and Chandler, 2001; Hollweck et al, 2022) play in HE as professionals "with dual identities, those of practitioner and academic" (Dickinson et al, 2023, p1). Existing research provides insight into topics such as how practitioners experience the transition into academia (c.f. Dickinson et al, 2020), the value of practitioners working within HEI (c.f. Johnson and Ellis, 2023) and how pracademics access their practitioner experience in their teaching (c.f. Stirk, 2023).

My own experience of joining academia after 12 years practitioner experience has had its ups and downs. I can relate to accounts that suggest pracademics sometimes feel that they've landed on the moon, that their identity has become liquid or that they sit on the boundary of legitimate academic activity (Dickinson et al, 2023). Slowly, I have become more confident about drawing my practitioner experience right into the centre of my teaching plans as I seek to empower my students with their own confidence to use the group-based, collaborative tools that I teach in their future careers. Choosing to increase my engagement with pedagogic dialogue has eased my journey. Initially, I drew upon Open Space Learning (Monk et al, 2011), assuming students would bring a wealth of experience into our collaborative learning environment, just as I had previously expected work colleagues to bring theirs to bear upon work-based tasks and objectives. More recently, I have begun to associate my teaching practice with interdisciplinarity (c.f. Gibbs, 2023; Klein, 2017), authenticity (c.f. Ajjawi et al, 2024; Gulikers et al, 2004;), and compassionate pedagogy (c.f. Gilbert, n.d.; Harvey et al, 2020).

With this QIC, I would like to encourage RMLE UnConference participants to share their experience of incorporating practitioner voices into their teaching and of being or working alongside pracademics. We might ask ourselves:

- What do students want and what do they need from the practitioner voice?
- How does the practitioner voice support employability and making the inauthentic authentic?
- What is the difference experienced by students when practitioner voices are heard through being taught by a pracademic rather than through guest lectures and teaching resources?
- Do pracademics take a different approach to achieving inclusivity and engagement in their classrooms?
- How is the transition of practitioners into academia supported and enhanced by working alongside career academics?
- What and how do career academics gain from working alongside pracademics?
- How to we recognise and reward the value of pracademics alongside the more established career paths of either research- or teaching-focused career academics?

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Reflection Without Growth? Rethinking Reflective Practice in a Large-Scale, Intensive Business Simulation

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Context & Concern

Why do we ask students to reflect? As Dewey (1933) put it, "We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience." We hope they have an awareness of something shifting in their thinking and approach to events based on a thoughtful appraisal of their experience evaluated in the context of learned theories, principles and practices (Zhai et al., 2023). We hope that students can demonstrate their learning through evidence of growth captured in these reflections. We believe that if they can successfully reflect, they have the capacity to transfer learning from the classroom to the world (Ambrose et al., 2010). Reflecting is an opportunity for consolidating learning, challenging prior assumptions and embracing new perspectives. It is through reflection that metacognition is activated and novel ideas and approaches emerge as students deconstruct and reconstruct their learning.

I teach a 650-student, pre-experience master's business simulation module delivered in a 3-week intensive block. Students work in teams of 6–7 to run a virtual company, with assessment comprising:

1. A 4000-word written strategic analysis of their company's decisions.
2. A 2000-word written reflection on their team dynamics.

While the strategic analysis is generally strong, the reflective component is weaker. Submissions often demonstrate compliance with the task rather than authentic engagement, with many students defaulting to describing events or focusing on performance outcomes rather than personal and collective growth. This is despite:

- Pre-provided resources on reflective practice.
- A step-by-step written guide to effective reflection.
- A 90-minute debrief session on team experience and reflective approaches.

The reflective element is intended to develop a growth mindset, yet students' work often suggests a fixed-performance orientation.

Key Issues

- Reflection is treated as a perfunctory requirement rather than a learning tool.
- Students' limited professional experience constrains their ability to contextualize insights.
- The module's compressed schedule leaves little space for reflection to be timely and impactful.
- With 650 students, providing individualized, in-depth feedback on reflection is challenging.

Questions for Exploration

1. How can students be helped to view reflection as integral to improving performance, not just an assessment tick-box?
2. In an intensive 3-week module, where in the learning journey should reflection occur to make it timely and useful?
3. Which structured frameworks work best for scaffolding reflection among students with minimal professional experience?
4. How can we harness the simulation's real-time decisions and outcomes to trigger in-the-moment reflection, not just retrospective reporting?
5. How might assessment design balance rewarding authentic reflection with discouraging polished but superficial narratives?
6. What strategies prevent reflective writing from becoming descriptive rather than critically analytical?
7. What scalable methods allow for depth and personalization of feedback in very large cohorts?
8. Which technologies can facilitate structured, personalised reflection without overburdening faculty?
9. How do we enable students to carry reflective skills beyond the module into internships, projects, and careers?
10. What level of pastoral care should be embedded for students processing extremely negative team experiences?

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Group “Moka Pot”

Embracing care, kindness, and inclusion in academia

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Fun Fact: If you’re a coffee lover, you have Italy to thank for the Moka Pot. The Moka Pot was invented by Alfonso Bialetti in 1933 and brought the first Italian espresso machine to households worldwide. The distinctive octagonal design and stovetop brewing method have made it a favorite among coffee enthusiasts and a symbol of Italian coffee culture. The Moka Pot has forever changed how we brew and enjoy coffee at home. See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Preventing peripherality: How can we support our student's sense of belonging in academia

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Belonging: '*The feeling of being comfortable and happy in a particular situation or with a particular group of people, and being treated as a full member of the group' (Cambridge Dictionary)*

The act of learning has an impact on our own identities, shaping and developing who we are and who we envisage ourselves becoming. It is argued that learning takes place on a number of different levels, with one of the key variables being the social involvement of the participants (Keay *et al* 2014). Feeling like you belong is therefore important for a student because it can directly affect their academic success, in addition to a sense of community being predictive of well-being, satisfaction with life, and reduced loneliness (McNamara et al 2021). We are witnessing a lack of engagement and attendance in our courses at LJMU, as students balance studies alongside part-time jobs. There is also the rise in mental health problems, that is adding to the transient nature of student life. But this peripheral participation means they never fully align themselves with the University and they never fully feel a sense of belonging. I am interested to explore how we can encourage a less peripheral approach, instilling a willingness to become central and to cultivate a sense of community and belonging within the student cohorts. Hulene et al (2023) argue that there are opportunities for universities to shift their ways of thinking about student belonging by moving away from a mentality that restricts belonging to physical spaces on campus and adopting more holistic approaches. But what does that look like? Brands cultivate communities and consumer tribes, bringing people together over a shared passion for a brand. How can we develop a sense of community with our teaching so the students feel part of something?

My QIC is therefore about cultivating a culture of acceptance and inclusion. I believe belonging creates a foundation for students to thrive, not just academically, but emotionally and socially. Belonging helps students feel safe being themselves, which is crucial when they're exploring who they are and how they fit into the world. What can we do to facilitate this?

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Teaching with care

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As I continue to develop my identity as a management educator and researcher, my most pressing questions currently revolve around the role of care, kindness, and empathy in higher education. At RMLE2025, I became involved in developing a kindness and empathy 'toolkit' designed to support more compassionate classroom practices. This initiative is grounded in the belief that emotionally intelligent pedagogy can foster deeper connection, inclusion, and wellbeing – not just as a pastoral concern, but as an integral part of learning.

In the next phase of this work, we will be using autoethnographic diary-keeping to collect insights into how students respond to acts of compassion in the classroom. Our hope is that these accounts will offer a nuanced, lived understanding of how care is experienced (or not) in educational settings. We are particularly interested in the small, often overlooked moments of relational teaching: learning names, a check-in after class, or a willingness to sit with discomfort.

Research on this topic has led me to a set of interrelated questions:

- What does it mean to teach with kindness, particularly in the context of business and management education where productivity, performance, and efficiency are often privileged? Particularly in my own field of finance, where 'maximising shareholder wealth' is an unquestioned mantra.
- Can kindness be operationalised into pedagogical practice, or is its value found precisely in its spontaneity and relational nature?
- How do we avoid instrumentalising empathy while still creating space for emotional learning as a legitimate part of the curriculum?
-

There are also broader institutional questions to consider. While care and kindness are increasingly spoken about in the context of EDI or wellbeing strategies, they are still rarely discussed as central to the academic project itself. I wonder whether this reflects a discomfort with emotionality in educational spaces, or perhaps an assumption that kindness is incompatible with academic rigour. I am interested in how these assumptions might shift if kindness was framed not as remedial but as critical: a lens through which we challenge dominant norms of competition, detachment and individualism.

As we develop our toolkit and gather further ethnographic data, I would like to explore how 'care-full' teaching might disrupt traditional power dynamics in the classroom and open up possibilities for co-creation between students and educators.

I am also interested in how these questions connect to issues of sustainability. If we want to educate future managers to be responsible, collaborative, and empathetic leaders, then shouldn't our pedagogical practices model these very qualities? Might kindness, in this context, be seen not as a soft add-on, but as a foundation for more sustainable, inclusive, and values-driven management education?
The RMLE Unconference seems like the perfect space to continue to explore these questions with others who are thinking about similar themes. I would particularly welcome ideas around methodologies for researching care in educational contexts, and how we might evaluate the impact of such practices without undermining their spirit.

Reclaiming Place in Management Education: Designing Regenerative Curricula for Civic Learning

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What might a business school look like if we truly embraced our role as a civic anchor—embedded, accountable, and locally impactful? This question led us to reimagine curriculum not as a container for delivering content, but as a regenerative process - deeply connected to local ecosystems, civic actors, and the lived realities of our students.

Instead of relying on idealised global case studies, our students work on real regional challenges that involve multiple stakeholders and impact the whole ecosystem. They co-create solutions with local businesses, public authorities, and community groups in "real-life collaboratories". It's messy. It's uncertain. And it's exactly what responsible management often looks like in practice. It enables students to experience meaningful knowledge exchange, reinforcing the business school's role as a place-leader and anchor institution for sustainable innovation. This practice strengthens university-community relationships and enhances students' sense of belonging and purpose.

Our regenerative curriculum approach prioritises practice-based, immersive, stakeholder-driven, and context-sensitive learning experiences. Aligned with design thinking principles, we emphasise human-centricity, empathy, collaboration, and interdisciplinarity (Dunne & Martin, 2006; Bowland, 2014). Instead of conventional lectures, students engage directly with local challenges, enhancing their critical reflectivity and sense of responsibility regarding global issues, particularly the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Ferreira, 2021).

We draw on Schwittay's (2021) critical-creative pedagogy, which integrates design-based activities, experiential teaching, serious play, and future-oriented practices to foster equitable and sustainable futures. Wahl's (2016) regenerative mission further informs our approach, promoting transitions from extractive systems to regenerative ones through holistic thinking, collaboration, and ecological awareness.

As we have developed this approach, we have encountered practical and philosophical tensions: how can we scaffold these experiences so that students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds feel empowered rather than overwhelmed? This is especially important for international students, who may arrive expecting structured, theory-heavy instruction but instead find themselves navigating ambiguous, collaborative projects rooted in unfamiliar local settings.

We also continue to ask how we can meaningfully assess such learning? Traditional evaluations often privilege polished outputs and theoretical mastery, but our model prioritises reflection, adaptability, collaboration, and relationship-building. These skills are not easily captured in rubrics.
Our role as educators has also shifted from focusing on content delivery to becoming facilitators of co-created, place-sensitive learning. Yet, this transition raises questions about how to maintain ethical and sustainable partnerships with communities, especially in contexts where universities and students are transient, and communities bear the burden of continuity.

This is not about romanticising the local. It's about rooting global challenges in real relationships with people, with systems, and with place. Our regenerative curriculum model draws inspiration from design thinking and critical-creative pedagogy, but our greatest insights have come not from theory, but from working alongside students and community partners in the unpredictable terrain of lived experience.

We're bringing our regenerative concept to RMLE to find others exploring similar territory. Who else is building regenerative, place-based business education? What is working, and what remains unresolved? How can we create space for uncertainty, experimentation, and relational learning within rigid academic structures?

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Good Place Innovators: Project website https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/designineducation/

Designing Learning Environments

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I am deeply interested in how we design learning environments that enable students in management education to thrive - not only in terms of attainment, but also enjoyment, inclusion, and well-being. Across my research, I aim to understand what really matters to students and how educators can create conditions that bring out their best.

One strand of this work explores gamification (Fullard, 2024a). I have seen how playful and game-based approaches can increase student engagement and enjoyment, as well as boost outcomes. Yet I remain curious: when does gamification spark genuine learning, and when does it risk being a distraction? How can we capture its effects beyond immediate engagement to assess its impact on deeper skills like collaboration and critical thinking?

Another focus is technology (Fullard, 2024b, Fullard, 2025a). Digital tools are now embedded in higher education, but my findings suggest students rarely want technology to replace traditional teaching. They value technology most when it supports, rather than substitutes, human connection. This raises exciting questions about how we can design blended learning that uses technology creatively while preserving the dialogue and relationships students see as central to learning.

I am equally drawn to questions of scale and diversity (Fullard, 2025b). Small-group, discussion-based seminars often enhance both attainment and enjoyment, but they are resource-intensive. What is the "right" scale for management education that balances interaction, quality, and accessibility? Linked to this is the diversity of teaching teams. In international classrooms, I have found that students often prefer "home" teachers - contrary to much of the literature on student preferences on their teacher characteristics. This finding opens important debates about belonging, representation, and how to structure teaching teams for increasingly global cohorts.

Methodologically, I often use experiments - predominately vignette experiments and randomized controlled trials - to test how specific teaching practices affect outcomes. At the same time, I am eager to engage with colleagues using other approaches to broaden the conversation and evidence base.

At the RMLE Unconference, I hope to exchange ideas with others who share a passion for management education, to challenge my assumptions, and to co-develop new ways of thinking about how we teach and learn. For me, the most exciting part of this field is that every question - about games, technology, class size, or diversity - ultimately circles back to a bigger one: how do we create learning environments where students truly flourish?

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Rethinking the Business School to Restore Higher Education

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You should be angry. You must not be bitter. Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. It doesn't do anything to the object of its displeasure. So use that anger. You write it. You paint it. You dance it. You march it. You vote it. You do everything about it. You talk it. Never stop talking it.

- Maya Angelou

This QIC explores an alternative future for those places we call Business Schools, endeavouring to embrace a greater critical and liberating academic voice and activism in the face of damaging managerialist practices, within a dominant market capitalist environment. The QIC provocation follows on from a whole line of other academics, who have cast a critical spotlight on business schools. Most recently Fleming (2021), Tourish (2019) and Parker (2018) have primarily focused heavily on a critique (around such areas as corruption, complicity, mental health, exclusion, social injustice) and have also opened a door slightly ajar to some alternative ways of organising. My provocation attempts to open this door fully to the heterotopic notion of the 'Restorative Business School' (the subject of my upcoming book) that academics can potentially craft, not only for themselves individually and collectively, but for resisting and changing Higher Education in an institutional sense. With this in mind, pivotal embedded provocations emerge such as the significance of slow scholarship, radical care and bio-cultural connection in such a critically performative journey.

I argue that the academics within the walls of the Business School have the capacity to be key actors for such an undertaking. Whilst the language, subjects, practices, spaces and places would change, I argue that the business school, when we compare with other schools, still employ a diverse enough set of academics, ontologically and epistemologically open enough to take on board this emergent role. Usual academic suspects from organisational sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political economy, critical management studies and history still inhabit business schools and are able to see beyond these walls to embrace other disciplinary wide knowledge. Whilst such suspects are diminishing in numbers, there is a growing appreciation by others across the sector that any discussion about the meaning and purpose of work within and beyond HE in the future, needs such critical, reflexive and contextual knowledge.

It is a provocation that does not tinker with language, disciplines and practices. It attempts to move away from the corrupted mindset of being agile, all in the blind pursuit of economic and organisational growth, touted by most business schools. It does not use corporate language such as entrepreneurship, innovation, human resource management with an overarching importance of instrumental terms, such as employability and knowledge exchange. It does not ask questions which I would argue are peripheral, such as are business schools too big, have they enough people with 'real-world' business experience, etc.

It is an existential provocation about hope above what could be seen on first glance as a dystopic future for business schools and HE overall. Could the time be ripe for systemic change?

Drawing on mapping hopeful pathways more broadly, I would like to hear from people around what constitute possible restorative practices above and beyond their individual and collective impact. Moreover, I am keen to explore initiatives which could impact on the future of business schools and HE more broadly and understand the diverse ways such a restorative future could be crafted with unconference colleagues, foregrounding relational wellbeing and even anarchy and concealment, to counter the caring platitudes of a managerialist, transparent order.

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Group “Eyeglasses”

Digital learning and AI in management education

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Fun Fact: The invention of the first eyeglasses in Italy during the 13th century was a game-changer for people with vision problems. This simple yet ingenious invention allowed individuals to see more clearly and efficiently carry out everyday tasks. Eyeglasses have also become a fashion statement, with countless styles and designs available to suit different tastes. This Italian innovation, considered one of the most life-changing inventions, has significantly improved the quality of life for millions of people worldwide. See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Reimagining Management Education in the Age of Generative AI

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The progression of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) and wider technological innovation is accelerating profound shifts in management education. As tools like ChatGPT and Sora increasingly deliver personalised feedback, simulate decision-making, and support learner autonomy, a critical question arises: What is the need for ongoing face-to-face (F2F) classes, and how do educators create distinctive value while acknowledging these advancements?

QIC 1:
The utility of GAI in automating cognitive tasks and supporting scalable learning is clear. Yet, management education is not solely about knowledge transfer, it is about developing judgment, empathy, ethical reasoning, and the capacity to navigate ambiguity. These are inherently human qualities, best cultivated through embodied dialogue, reflexivity, and co-creation. F2F encounters offer unique spaces for spontaneity, trust-building, and affective learning, elements that current technologies still struggle to emulate meaningfully**.**

How do prospective management students perceive the value of face-to-face learning experiences in developing human-centered skills, compared to the capabilities of generative AI in management education?

QIC 2:
The rise of hybrid and remote working patterns challenges the traditional reliance on physical presence. Should educators offer more remote classes in response? Possibly, but this shift should not default to convenience or efficiency alone. The format must be pedagogically driven. Remote learning should be designed to foster active participation, community, and critical engagement, rather than replicating content delivery online (Bond et al., 2020). The question is not just about where learning happens, but how and to what end?

How can educators design remote and hybrid learning experiences that maintain pedagogical integrity by fostering active participation, community, and critical engagement, rather than focusing solely on convenience or efficiency?

QIC 3:
How do we integrate humanity in our educational offerings as AI becomes more embedded? As GAI handles technical tasks, the educator's role must evolve from knowledge authority to sense-maker, mentor, and curator of human connection. Embedding humanity means foregrounding inclusion, care, ethics, and social context, not as add-ons, but as core to the curriculum and delivery model.

How can educational practices and curricula be designed to embed human-centered values—such as inclusion, care, ethics, and social context—as core elements, while AI increasingly handles technical tasks?

This submission seeks to explore these tensions and opportunities. Rather than displacing educators, GAI invites a rethinking of their purpose: to design experiences that amplify what machines cannot replicate. The future of management education may be hybrid, but its impact will depend on our ability to make learning not only more accessible, but more human.

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Multimodal Assessment and its Role in Developing and Evaluating Multiple Literacies

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I have been increasingly drawn to the question of how we assess learning in management education—not just in terms of outcomes, but in terms of whether existing assessment methods are effective in developing and evaluating the competencies that are required of our students. There is a demand for future-ready management graduates who are not only analytically proficient but also able to navigate complex, dynamic, and digitally mediated environments.

While conventional assessments remain highlight relevant for management education in assessing key skills such as critical thinking, they tend to privilege a narrow set of literacies, primarily linguistic and analytical, while overlooking other critical competencies such as digital and even media capabilities which are arguably harder but more important in today's context.

I am currently in the process of experimenting with multimodal assessment strategy which includes—podcasts, digital storytelling, even infographics. However, I keep coming back to a few core questions and concerns:

- How do we ensure these approaches are rigorous without reverting to traditional metrics?
- What support to colleagues and other educators require in implementing these forms of assessments?
- What kinds of literacies are we unintentionally privileging or neglecting? What should we focus on?
- How do students perceive the value of these assessments, especially in credential-driven environments? How do we help them understand assessment as a learning process and not just a grading tool?

Multimodal assessments show promise, but they are not without challenges. Operating within frameworks that emphasize standardization and comparability, such approaches are often viewed as less rigorous or harder to validate. The task becomes even more complex given the limited availability of frameworks to support the evaluation of such literacies. Developing criteria that are robust, fair, and meaningful requires ongoing experimentation and reflection.

Fighting for Integrity in an Intelligent world

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Professional context:
Teaching staff are very much on the front line when dealing with AI integrity issues. So far though, it seems institutions and even departments have wildly varying approaches to AI. Some might have a traffic light system for when students can use or not use AI, some have deep integration with technology companies and AI is embedded across their workflows. Other institutions have neither and choose to ignore the integrity issues when grading AI written submissions. Staff members too have very polarising views on the use of AI. Moreover, less forward-looking universities are simply leaving it to staff to experiment in the labyrinth of A---I models available. Consistency therefore is clearly a problem and is only set to worsen through varying levels of institutional policy and provision.

Unfortunately, the problems do not stop there. From my experience as employability champion: marketing agencies, for example, are now overwhelmed with hundreds of suspiciously similar looking cover letters within hours of posting a job opening. If a small percentage of these applicants ever make it to interview, some graduates are said to have been unable to elaborate on their AI written CVs filled with empty buzz words and jargon. The student will then highly likely not get the job, NSS satisfaction scores could then blame the course and thus the University's reputation declines. This in turn impacts on future appeal of the university, recruitment and thus our jobs and future. Entry level jobs for graduates have also been disappearing due to the widespread implementation of AI. The world in which we grew up in and know is being radically disrupted.

So, this Unconference would be an ideal safe space for those of different faculties, institutions and countries to share their experiences. The hope is by the end, perhaps there is some consistency in terms of how departments could approach AI in the years to come, or at the very least, forge some new bonds to tackle these ongoing challenges together.

Management education QICs:

- How being taught by a machine will impact learning from a pedagogical perspective
- Examples of what AI written essays look and feel like
- Case study/horror submission stories
- Staff solutions
- Alternative assessment methods (the death of the essay, new learning outcomes)
- Teaching vs research uses of AI
- How staff can support students and set guard rails
- How universities could support staff (software provision, workload impact/optimisation)
- Dark side of AI use (ethics, sustainability, societal impact)
- On the horizon (incoming AI developments)
- What is the result we are now working towards as education providers?

In closing, this battle between technological innovations and academic integrity is just getting started and poses a real ongoing threat to the value of our degrees and student learning experience.
So far, the only clear winners seem to be the tech companies…

Working out a response to AI: Might reports of the death of the take-home essay be greatly exaggerated?

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Business schools are still working out an appropriate response to the irruption of AI, particularly in terms of its impact on assessment integrity. Since the release of ChatGPT in 2022, students' use of AI has exploded across multiple aspects of their private and study lives, in ways that often seem woefully uncritical to their instructors. While some educators have called for AI-centred assessments, others have decried the end of management education as we know it. Across the sector, the take-home essay has ceased to be a reliable and trusted form of assessment, while alternative, supposedly 'AI-proof', forms of assessment remain problematic.

At the RMLE unconference, I would like to contribute to the discussion about what business schools can do in response to AI, by arguing that the take-home essay remains a valuable form of assessment for developing crucial skills (research, analysis, critical thinking, argumentation…), but that we need to change how essays are set and assessed, and how we guide students to develop their academic practice that includes AI as a tool while ensuring the quality of their learning.

Based on my experience leading a foundational first-year module with 850 students across four degrees, I propose three areas of focus for instructors. First, develop basic AI skills to help students understand what Large Language Models are, how they work, what they can and cannot do, and how best to use them for their studies and future work careers. The aim here is to create a level playing field for all the students in the cohort, but also to demystify a technology whose outputs may seem unquestionable due to its complexity.

Second, engage in a genuine conversation with students to discern AI uses that are beneficial and those that are detrimental to their learning and future career prospects. Informed by recent research on authenticity in assessments, which suggests that genuine dialogue with learners about assessment purposes promotes their engagement (Ajjawi et al., 2024, 2025; Fawns et al., 2024), such conversation would involve, over the course of the module term, practical exercises using AI and joint reflection about the effects of different uses on the quality of students' learning and the work they produce.

Third, design and grade assessments to emphasise the process of inquiry, rather than the essay as a finished product, to ensure that uses of AI that promote student learning are rewarded with higher grades. The approach here involves scaffolding students' acquisition of critical inquiry skills, through class activities involving literature research, critical evaluation of readings, and argumentation. Assessment criteria also need to be adjusted to reward evidence of critical inquiry (original, genuine arguments resulting from unique exploration of literature), rather than what AI does well independently (articulate writing, valid but bland arguments, unspecific generic waffle).

This suggested approach, which is ready to be tested and refined following initial pilot work, aims to address academic integrity issues while developing crucial critical-thinking and analytical skills alongside AI literacy. Moreover, our context enables us to explore issues of scalability to large student numbers, and impact at degree and program level. I very much look forward to sharing our emerging insights and learning from similar experiences at other institutions at the RMLE unconference in January.

Group “Barometer”

Reimagining classrooms

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Naima
Alison
Sam C.

Fun Fact: The barometer, an essential instrument for measuring atmospheric pressure, was invented by Italian scientist Evangelista Torricelli in the 17th century. Torricelli’s invention revolutionized meteorology, allowing for more accurate weather predictions and contributing to our understanding of the Earth’s atmosphere. Today, the mercury barometer remains a vital tool for scientists, pilots, and mariners, helping to keep us informed and safe.
See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Shut Your Eyes… Now Rethink the Classroom

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Shut your eyes.

Now think of that last moment when you were teaching.
Where are you? What does the space look like?
Do your students look interested? Engaged? Curious?
Now open your eyes and ask yourself: how often have you found your students more absorbed in their screens than in your words?
How many times have you wondered, "Are they even listening? Does what I am saying make sense?"

These moments of reflection are not uncommon. Many of us question whether our lessons are intellectually stimulating, relevant, or simply too much for students to deal with. Are we striking the right balance between challenge and connection? Or are we unintentionally dimming the spark of curiosity?

Are We Draining the Joy from Learning?

Let's face it. We often expect students to sit still in lecture theatres, quiet and alert, ready to absorb intense content—sometimes for 50 minutes or longer. Could this be our way of ripping off the joy, creativity, and playfulness that once made learning feel alive?

These questions become more prevalent when teaching subjects that can be complex and distressing. For instance, teaching sustainability in business education—where conversations range from climate change to global inequalities—can be overwhelming. The subject requires understanding interconnected systems and confronting distressing truths about the world. This can lead to resistance, disengagement, and emotional fatigue. So maybe it's time to ask:

Is our current teaching model fit for the complexity and emotional depth of sustainability education?

Reimagining Learning Through Gamification

Gamification has emerged as a powerful antidote to disengagement. The use of game elements in non-game contexts has gained traction in education as an engaging and effective approach to teaching complex subjects. By placing students in realistic role-playing scenarios, it has proved particularly effective for cultivating skills and preparing them to confront challenges responsibly (Deterding et al., 2011).

But this isn't about turning education into a game. It's about sparking emotional connection, creating relevance, and fostering real-world problem-solving. It's about empathy and systems thinking—skills essential for addressing and responding to global challenges.

Introducing Playful Pedagogies… at a Slower Pace

Play doesn't mean superficiality. When paired with the "Slow Education" movement, playful learning becomes a radical, intentional act. Slow education calls for depth over speed, reflection over memorisation, joy over performance (Berg & Seeber, 2016). It asks us to spark discussions—paced, human dialogue not revolving around PowerPoint slides—that fosters reflection, inquiry and deep learning (Fullan et al, 2018).
So, what if we stopped trying to cover everything in 12 weeks and instead tried to uncover something real? What if making sense of new content were not the outcome of good teaching but the starting point?

So let us ask ourselves:
• How much do we value joy and excitement in HE, particularly in ESD?
• What could a classroom feel like if we took it outdoors—or reimagined it entirely?
• How might slow education principles enrich students' learning journeys and tutor relationships?
• And what might we, as tutors, gain in return?

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Rethinking assessment forms in Business Education with focus on learning and 'Bildung'

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Assessment practices in higher education are under growing scrutiny for how they influence student learning and development. Originally developed to ensure fairness and motivation (Schinske and Tanner 2014; Dobrow et al., 2011), grades are now highlighted in research for their detrimental effects. They have been shown to reduce intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 2001; Kohn 1993), shift focus from deep learning to performance and memorization (Brilleslyper et al. 2012; Knowlton 2010), and induce stress, anxiety, and unhealthy competition (Tannock 2017; Chamberlin et al., 2018; Khanna 2015). Furthermore, grading may obstruct the development of transformative skills like critical reflexivity, which are essential for lifelong learning and are best cultivated through dialogue, collaboration, and meaningful engagement (Dyer and Hurd 2016; Walker et al. 2019).

In response to these concerns, educators across disciplines are rethinking assessment forms trying to shift the focus from performance to learning and holistic development or 'Bildung' which can be described as the formative process through which individuals cultivate their intellectual, moral, and aesthetic capacities by engaging with culture, society, and the world, aiming not merely at knowledge acquisition but at personal and ethical self-development (see for example Biesta, 2002). To support such broader educational aim some researchers propose eliminating grades altogether (Kohn 1993; Tannock 2017), while others suggest alternative approaches such as grading without points (Brilleslyper et al. 2012) or delaying grade disclosure (Jackson and Marks 2016). This has sparked renewed interest in alternatives to grades including 'gradeless learning' approaches, comprising pass/fail systems and narrative evaluations (Golding 2019; McMorran and Ragupathi 2020).

These approaches are not only designed to reduce anxiety and foster intrinsic motivation (Bloodgood et al. 2009; McMorran, Ragupathi, and Luo 2017; Hayek et al. 2015), but also to support the broader process of student Bildung, i.e., the development of self-regulated learners who can critically reflect, collaborate, and take ownership of their educational journey (Danielewicz and Elbow 2009). Such skills are not only relevant for educating responsible citizens but are increasingly valued in contemporary workplaces that call for responsible managers who can solve complex problems that demand a high degree of collaboration, communication, and continuous learning.

Building on the critique of grading but with a purpose of looking towards new ways of assessing learning, we would like to discuss alternatives to traditional grading in business schools, rethinking assessment through a lens of learning and Bildung. The purpose is to explore possible paths towards creating more equitable, engaged, and responsible business education.

Questions, ideas and concerns for discussion:

- How can we rethink assessment systems to best support student development and growth?
- How can we retain the benefits of grading while also incorporating gradeless assessment forms?
- What would we have to do differently if we changed to assessment practices with reduced or no grading?
- How can we work with feedback formats that effectively support students' academic and professional development when adopting gradeless assessment?
- How do alternative assessment models shape students' long-term trajectories into graduate education and the workforce?

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Tensions in Decolonising and Diversifying Management Education

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This QIC draws on an ongoing project at a UK business school, where we have been embedding decolonisation and diversification across teaching and curriculum design. We define decolonisation as the recognition of the epistemic constraints within dominant ways of knowing, the exposure of underlying biases, and the creation of space for alternative frameworks (Choat et al., 2024; Shahjahan et al., 2022). This extends beyond inclusion to interrogate and reconfigure the structures in which knowledge is produced and legitimised (Arshad et al., 2021; Everett et al., 2023).

In our project, what began as a redesign of two core modules has developed into a school-wide initiative involving over 20 modules across multiple programmes. Drawing on qualitative data collected from students and academic staff, we have identified three persistent tensions that warrant further exploration.

1. The limits of student-led decolonisation
Our approach foregrounded student voice, using participatory and emancipatory methodologies (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Freire, 1978; Fricker, 2007) to position students as co-creators of epistemic change. However, while students welcomed diversification and broader representation, they were notably less engaged with the more disruptive dimensions of decolonisation. A dominant concern was employability: students preferred content and teaching approaches that aligned with perceived career goals. In practice, this led to more conservative outcomes than intended, raising important questions about the viability of student-led disruption within professionalised programmes.

- How can decolonisation be meaningfully advanced in business schools when students, positioned as co-creators, prioritise diversification and employability over structural critique?

2. Balancing accessibility with integrity for academic staff
Interviews with academic staff surfaced a related tension: while many expressed scepticism about superficial or tokenistic interventions (e.g., 'decolonial washing', Le Grange et al., 2020), they also sought accessible, low-friction ways to engage. Given the limited time available for pedagogic innovation, staff were keen to avoid additional burdens. Yet ease and standardisation can risk diluting the critical edge of decolonial work. This raises strategic and philosophical dilemmas about how to scale meaningful change across a busy and diverse faculty.

- How can educators be supported to engage meaningfully with decolonisation without demanding expertise or time they may not have?
- How do we avoid reducing decolonisation to a toolkit, while still offering accessible entry points for staff?

3. Queering the curriculum within normative cultures
A parallel strand of our work examined the experiences of queer-identifying students through focus groups and interviews. Participants described a prevailing culture of 'professionalism' that subtly policed gender and sexual expression. Many reported the need to 'code switch' to fit into dominant expectations. While queering the curriculum offers one route to disrupt this (Parker, 2016; Rumens, 2023), it also raises questions about resistance, discomfort, and backlash in an environment where most students and staff do not identify as queer.

- How do business schools open space for queerness while navigating the constraints of dominant norms?

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Opening Doors and Embracing a Custodial Ethic Grounded in "Country as Teacher"

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Universities can often feel like places of exclusion. Locked doors, security passes, and restricted access don't just protect buildings; they signal who is welcome and who is not. These structures mirror long histories of elitism and disconnection. Yet this is not the only way to imagine the university. In earlier times, universities described themselves as part of the community, places of exchange rather than separation. I want to suggest we return to that spirit and think about management education as a space built on reciprocity and relationship.

To do this, we need to learn to notice. When I ask students to reflect on the spaces where they feel they learn best, they rarely mention lecture theatres or closed rooms. More often, they describe learning with and alongside nature. "I learn best near the trees," one student told me. Teachers say much the same, picturing learning spaces that are open, flexible, and connected with people, plants, animals, and the land itself.

Indigenous knowledges help us see this differently. They remind us that Country is alive, dynamic, and always teaching. Country is not backdrop but active presence. Yolngu understandings of mangrove ecosystems, for example, show how care for place rests on kinship, reciprocity, and balance (Spillman et al., 2023).

When we take this seriously in management education, leadership itself looks different. Rather than efficiency or competition, the emphasis falls on gratitude, collaboration, and custodial responsibility (Country et al., 2021; Wilson & Spillman, 2021). Relational ways of learning and leading make space for humility, fairness, and justice; qualities students need if they are to respond to the challenges of our time (Spillman et al., 2023).

The custodial ethic is central. People are not owners of land; they are caretakers. One Indigenous educator put it clearly: the best classroom is not enclosed, it is one where Country and Elders teach together, guiding students to listen closely and act with respect. For non-Indigenous students this means entering into relationship with humility, learning to walk alongside Country as a teacher rather than treating it as an object or resource.

This ethic prioritises reciprocity, balance, and responsibility to future generations (Graham, 1999; Loughrey, 2020; Cooms, 2023). It unsettles extractive measures of success and instead fosters approaches that sustain both culture and ecology (Bishop et al., 2019). Reciprocity ensures that no one (human or non-human) takes more than they need (Crane et al., 2019; Bishop et al., 2024). In management classrooms, embodying this principle offers students a different model of leadership: one that values care, accountability, and interdependence.

If we are to teach connection and reciprocity, then we must live them ourselves. This means opening doors, working with Country as teacher, and preparing future leaders to act not as extractors but as custodians of knowledge, people, and place. I would love to explore this approach with others at the 2026 RMLE Unconference to see where our ideas, understandings, experiences, and connections take us.

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Group “Typewriter”

Learning to question, doubt, and embrace irritation

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Maribel
Loveleen

Fun Fact: The typewriter, a game-changing invention that revolutionized how we communicate in written form, can be traced back to Italy. Italian inventor Giuseppe Ravizza dedicated much of his life to perfecting this groundbreaking device. His innovations in typewriter technology throughout the 19th century helped pave the way for modern keyboards and word-processing tools. The typewriter transformed the world of business, journalism, and literature, allowing for faster and more efficient written communication. See:
https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Learning to doubt

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Our issue: In an often demanding, unpredictable and unknowable world, the unsettling experience of doubt, broadly defined as the subjective experience of uncertainty, (Spicer, 2021) becomes both more widely felt and also important to listen to as it reveals that which matters to us (Segal, 2011). Yet at the same time, doubt is difficult to voice and engage with in organizations where cultures of certainty, expertise, and confidence dominate (Bouchard et al., 2025, Hay, 2014). Moreover, business schools add to this difficulty as they rarely discuss doubt as a topic of organizational concern nor doubting as a skill to be nurtured (Corlett et al., 2019; Hay, 2023).

Our concern: This neglect of doubt has a number of problematic consequences for our students. Firstly, it reinforces untroubled accounts of the world which are at odds with lived experiences of organizing. Put differently, it leaves students ill-prepared to deal with the challenging uncertainties of organizational life, when for example, our offered organizational tools fail to yield expected results. It is to neglect an important but typically unspoken aspect of 'real work' (Bouchard et al., 2025). Second, in an era of Artificial Intelligence where overly quick and certain knowledge is readily available, listening to our doubts becomes even more crucial to ensure a responsible and care-ful knowing (Lindebaum & Fleming, 2024). Third, since doubt is recognized as challenging to cope with (Spicer, 2021), and in the absence of organizational support, it can lead to negative outcomes such as feelings of isolation, inadequacy and ill health (Gill, 2015, Hay, 2014).

Our questions:
- How can we better prepare students to voice and engage with doubt in their future organizations?
- What theoretical resources are currently available to begin to foreground discussions of doubt in the classroom?
- What teaching methods might be best placed to facilitate learning to doubt?
- What types of doubts do students have in the classroom and how can educators encourage them to share these?
- Do management educators need to rethink their expert role to facilitate working with doubt?
- How can educators mobilize their own doubts to better support students?
- What challenges might management educators encounter in seeking to leverage doubt in the classroom?

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From Tick-Box to Toolbox: Rethinking Ethics in Management Learning and Education

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How can we teach ethics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and sustainability in ways that move beyond surface-level compliance and instead cultivate deep, critical engagement among business management students? These themes are often treated as add-ons - confined to standalone modules or elective training courses - rather than being embedded across curricula. This fragmented approach risks reinforcing the notion that ethical and sustainable thinking is an optional 'extra' or 'nice to have', rather than integral to responsible business leadership.

My concern is that current pedagogical models may not adequately prepare students to navigate the ethical complexities and systemic challenges they will face in practice. I am interested in exploring how we can design learning experiences that foster reflexivity, ethical reasoning, and systems thinking. For example, how might threshold concepts help students confront and work through the discomfort and ambiguity inherent in ethical decision-making? What role can experiential learning (such as community-based projects, sustainability simulations, or live case studies) play in helping students connect theory to practice in ways that help them to construct meaning?

I am also curious about the institutional and cultural factors that shape how ethics, CSR, and sustainability are taught. Accreditation pressures, employability metrics, and market-driven curricula can constrain innovation in teaching. How do we navigate these tensions while staying true to our pedagogical values? What strategies can we use to embed ethical and sustainability thinking across management learning and education?

This QIC topic stems from ongoing conversations with colleagues in interdisciplinary settings. I am particularly interested in how decolonial and global perspectives can enrich our understanding of ethics and sustainability in management education. How do we ensure that our teaching reflects diverse worldviews and challenges dominant paradigms that may perpetuate inequity or environmental harm, particularly for the global south?

At the RMLE Unconference, I hope to engage with others who are grappling with similar questions. I am keen to explore collaborative research opportunities, insights from practice, and to co-create ideas for more equitable, transformative, and future-oriented approaches to teaching ethics, CSR, and sustainability. My goal is to contribute to a community of educators committed to preparing students not just to succeed in business, but to lead responsibly in a world facing urgent social and ecological challenges.

The grit in the oyster that could make the pearl: Harnessing irritation in Business School sustainability initiatives

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Issues and Concerns

Despite decades of initiatives and debates about the need to educate for sustainability leadership, academia is still not yet sufficiently proficient at delivering curricula that can produce graduates with the competences needed to effectively tackle sustainability challenges (Hensley, 2024; Tasdemir and Gazo, 2020).

Business schools have a major role to play in developing sustainability leadership in future business leaders (Marathe et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2024), yet the pace of change when it comes to sustainability (for instance standards and other regulations that frame business activity) is such that 'keeping up' with the latest developments and requirements is a major challenge for business school pedagogy and curricula. As such in practice, these mandates have still only been translated on a small scale, with sustainability issues inadequately integrated in business curricula and pedagogies, and their relevance often not being clear to students (Abdelgaffar, 2021; Colombo, 2023; Edwards et al., 2020).

Attempts to introduce more fundamental changes to curriculum working across disciplinary silos and/or attempts to involve students in sustainability initiatives within business schools themselves (e.g. student-led changes in catering provision) and which involve dialogue and negotiation with academic and campus service stakeholders are often sources of irritation and frustration. Rather than giving up and/or brushing such reactions under the carpet, we suggest developing a pedagogic approach which sensitises students to the organisational issues within business schools themselves which they may well encounter again in their professional lives, and make such reactions - irritations, frustrations and tensions - a springboard for discussion, debate and innovation leading to positive action, e.g. the development of the concept '*productive irritation*'as a dialogical method. Such an approach involves examination of powerbases and silos, inadequate communication and lack of resources but also the identification of allies and supporters and examination of how to harness support and help.

In so doing we propose a 'warts and all' approach in examining cases of the introduction of sustainability initiatives (sometimes co-created with students) in business schools in examining what went wrong as well as what went right and using such analysis and a spring board for further learning and leadership development. While cognizant that there are many other initiatives which could also be studied from this perspective, we offer as a starting point for such examination the Permahaven project at Cophenhagen Business School.

We propose that such an approach would involve *intergenerational learning,* specifically recognizing that students are a crucial sustainability learning resource and that a 'voice from the future' is key. In addition this calls for *humility* on our side, as both educators and organizational actors, as we must acknowledge that we do not have the best solution (Hannah, 2024). Many students have cutting edge knowledge and experiences garnered outside their studies that can add valuable insights into the classroom and business school context, in both bringing outdated curricula up to speed, contributing much-needed real-life input to the sustainability theories and models taught, and enhancing engagement (Dmochowski et al., 2016) but also bringing practical approaches to working with 'irritations'.

For our approach to work , we argue that business schools' leadership must become more open and less hierarchical in order to embrace the possibilities of intergenerational learning (Mannion, 2018) and that university leaders need to adopt an attitude of 'educational humility' (Greenleaf, 1991: 10; Hannah, 2024), which includes 'learning to listen' actively to their students and to accept (student identified) irritations, flaws, tensions with their own organizational systems, and to work with students to find ways of overcoming these. Just as great teachers take their students' ideas seriously, engage them in shared decision-making and recognize when their teaching is not having the desired results and search for new approaches (Waks, 2018), so too should university leaders if the sustainability agenda is to be

inclusive, contemporary and engaging. Humility is, moreover, recognised as essential to issues of intergenerational justice (MacKenzie, n.d.) such as sustainability.

Questions

- How can we conceptualize and operationalize the irritations, frustrations and tensions inherent in the development of sustainability initiatives within business schools?
- What pedagogical methods and approaches could we develop to harness such learning?
- What experiences do others have with intergenerational learning at business schools, including student input into sustainability curricula and in introducing and co-creating sustainability initiatives within business schools and universities themselves?

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What does it mean to teach accountability when we ourselves are shaped by structures of precarity and privilege?

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As a first-year PhD researcher in Area Studies, I am exploring how NGOs practise accountability through their engagement with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance, a global membership body of humanitarian organisations. The CHS Alliance promotes a shared accountability framework built around nine commitments designed to improve quality and accountability to affected communities. NGOs voluntarily join the Alliance to learn from peers, demonstrate commitment, and in some cases undergo external certification. Though presented as sector self-regulation, it raises critical questions about whose definitions of accountability dominate - donors, affected communities, or NGOs themselves.

For me, accountability is not just about compliance or reporting; it is about how individuals and organisations take responsibility for their actions, especially towards those with less power. This concern stretches beyond humanitarianism into management education, where students and practitioners are routinely asked to "act ethically" or "be accountable." But what do we mean by this, and who decides?

To help think through these questions in my research, I draw on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose theory of practice highlights how power operates through everyday habits (*habitus*), taken-for-granted assumptions (*doxa*), and resources such as knowledge, status, or networks (*capital*). While I use these concepts primarily to study NGOs, they have also shaped the questions I bring here: ***What hidden doxa govern how we teach accountability? How do our own habitus - shaped by class, culture, or institutional norms - affect the way we learn, teach, and evaluate knowledge?*** For me, these ideas are not abstract: they have revealed the silent forces shaping my research and experience in academia.

This inquiry is as personal as it is academic. As a first-generation early-career researcher from a non-traditional background, I often find myself navigating class-coded and cultural norms of academic writing and legitimacy, especially around abstract concepts like "reflexivity" or "professionalism." I struggle with academic English and often feel I am translating across cultural and disciplinary worlds. These challenges have pushed me to ask: can we really teach accountability without also practising it - in how we learn, write, and relate to one another?

I am especially interested in how we might create learning environments that are honest about discomfort and power, where emotions, accents, and working-class experience are not liabilities but lenses. What might it look like to centre positionality not as a box-ticking exercise in a methodology chapter, but as a pedagogical commitment? How might we make space for scholars and students who don't feel at home in traditional academic frames of knowledge?

At the RMLE Unconference, I hope to hold these questions with others: gently, openly, and without the pressure to perform expertise. I am not trying to offer a new framework; rather, I want to create a space of collective inquiry around the hidden assumptions shaping management and development education. How can we make these spaces more accountable, more alive, and more human?

Group “Gelato”

Exploring what it means to live with hope within war

Amy
Jessica
Sofiya

Fun Fact: Modern gelato is attributed to Procopio Cutò (Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli), who brought this delightful frozen treat to life. In 1903, Italo Marchioni patented a machine for crafting the iconic gelato cone. This delicious and creamy Italian dessert has since become a worldwide sensation, offering a wide range of flavors and textures that delight taste buds everywhere. See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Exploring the Complex Meanings and Manifestations of Hope for Those Living Within an Environment of Ongoing War

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As Taras Dobko, Rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) shared at the 2025 Ukrainian Studies Hub Conference, hope is strength "born of the marriage between magnanimity and humility." To believe in hope is to be on a mission.

Our research project is a mission. Together, we aim to explore the complexities and nuances of how Ukrainian educators' have both nurtured and enacted hope during the past 3.5 years of living within a genocidal war. For those of us who live and work in places and spaces of relative peace and privilege, there is much to be learned from our Ukrainian colleagues who so bravely "wake each day to depredation, devastation, isolation, exhaustion, and fatigue" (Kenworthy et al., 2025a) and yet draw upon hope to move forward with dignity, respect, and a passionate embracing of their roles as educators and global citizens.

We explore this because we know that hope not only plays a pivotal role for educators who are navigating trauma and living within crisis (Kenworthy et al., 2025b), but it also has many meanings (Muehlfeld et al., 2025). Nurturing this ethos as it applied to two of our three universities, our research is embedded within the 2025 Ukrainian Catholic University's (UCU) theme of "Hope" and the upcoming 2025-2026 Notre Dame theme of "Cultivating Hope." Research in this area is critical because, as the Notre Dame President, Rev. Robert A. Dowd, reminds us, we live in a world "where hope is often in short supply." Our view is that hope is action, not inaction. In fact, the Ukrainian word for "hope" is Надія, which has "action" (дія) embedded within it. Capturing the complex processes through which Ukrainian educators engage hope has the potential to help guide other management educators, students, and higher education community members navigate future challenges and uncertainties.

Additionally, our work responds to current calls in management education like that put forth by the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* journal in their special issue call for papers which states, "Hope is situated between *what is* and *what might be*. As such, hope is typically experienced under conditions of uncertainty, and there is no paucity of uncertainty in these times of geo-political upheaval and existential threats posed by climate change. Why and how should/can we hope in these troubling times?"

Our shared goal is to work to extend existing scholarship from faculty at partner institutions and beyond, including complex considerations of hope and justice at work and hope as a catalyst for meaning-making through the lens of decent work, motivation and psychological capital, including potential work-family tensions stemming from all-consuming engagement in work activities. We see our research as building bridges not only between management educators in different parts of the world, but also between research areas investigating phenomena related to individuals' personal and professional lives. In the end, we view our research as stemming from a shared responsibility to leverage the opportunities we hold as management educators and global citizens and to continue shining the world's light on Ukraine and her people.

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Group “University”

Navigating engagement in its many forms

Ash
Sam B.
Sadegh
Lisa
Antonis
Liz
Frances

Fun Fact: The University of Bologna is considered the world’s first university. The term “university” originates from the Latin “universus,” signifying an assembly of masters and scholars dedicated to the pursuit of higher learning, encompassing both secular and religious knowledge. European academics were expected to have mastered the seven liberal arts, from grammar to music and astronomy. See: https://www.learnitalianpod.com/2023/05/02/famous-italian-inventions/

Making the Invisible Visible: Overcoming Barriers to Successful Global Business School Partnerships

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Business Schools currently face extreme pressures, pressures that are resulting in the pursuit of redundances, departmental closures and/or teaching portfolio harmonisation. Such challenges have arisen due to the strong reliance on Business Schools to generate significant financial contributions to their respective parent institutions, within a context of a dependence on oversea student recruitment, uncertain geo-politics plus ever-changing immigration and visa policies. Accordingly, Business Schools have sought new strategies to engage foreign students for example, via transnational education and international partnerships (see; Dixon, Slanickova and Warwick, 2013). Strategic-alignment frameworks suggest that the latter are co-developed with institutional strategy (see; Fehrenbach and Huisman, 2024; Ayoubi and Al-Habaibeh, 2006) yet such models only go so far. There remains a lack of evidence of the antecedents to the effective selection, and efficient management of international Business School partnerships (Roberts et al., 2025).

This QIC would like to shine light on the barriers to international partnership success in the hope of making visible the invisible factors that can often lead to mutually beneficial relationships. In particular, we would like to focus on human areas, such as the role of relationships (within and in-between both Business Schools); the importance (or otherwise) of fit between institutional values; the function of hierarchy in enabling or restricting idea generation; plus the importance of creating team psychological safety cultures between often mixed departmental groups (for example, those that include professional service staff, academics plus key institutional policy makers).

From our conversations, and in order to better explore and support our international communities, we would like to further investigate the following ideas:

- What inter-and intra-team factors are particularly helpful in setting up international Business School partnerships?
- What are key obstacles to overcome in generating and running successful institutional partnerships?
- How much value do positive, ongoing intra/inter-institutional relations offer in key partnership delivery?
- How can we best leverage the expertise and contributions of all stakeholders, including faculty and non-academic staff, for productive global partnerships?
- How does the role of hierarchy aid or negate the success of international partnerships?
- How can inclusive international education project team cultures be created and what is their role in successful partnership decision making?
- What is the role of inter-institutional value fit and how does this aid long-term, successful partnerships?

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"Too Valuable to Promote?": Exploring the Paradox of Academic Leadership and Career Progression in Management Education

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Introduction:
I'm interested in exploring a paradox which is increasingly observed in higher education institutions, particularly within management education, where high-performing academic leaders with significant administrative or strategic responsibilities find themselves *inadvertently penalised* during career progression. Anecdotal evidence and initial observations suggest that academics who are exceptionally effective in their current roles, often due to a unique combination of leadership skills, institutional knowledge, and cross-functional coordination, may be *desk-rejected* or discouraged from pursuing promotion or more senior leadership positions. The rationale often given by line managers is that these individuals are "too valuable" in their current roles and "irreplaceable", creating a bottleneck effect in their career trajectory.

At the RMLE, I would like to discuss how underlying institutional logics, management discourses, and HR practices that contribute to this phenomenon. I would also like to consider how career progression is negotiated within universities, particularly how internal power dynamics, talent management policies, and leadership development practices affect academics in critical leadership positions. My particular interest is focused on the context of business and management schools, where the demand for hybrid scholar-administrators is high, but succession planning and workload balancing often lag behind.

I have found an interesting foundation for discussion in the existing literature exploring the challenges faced by hybrid academics who combine scholarly and administrative roles (Deem, 2004; Floyd, 2012). Despite their growing importance, such roles are often overlooked in promotion systems focused on research outputs (Bolden *et al*., 2012). The rise of managerialism and performance regimes in academia (Clarke & Knights, 2015) has further complicated recognition of leadership contributions. Kallio *et al*. (2016) highlight tensions between efficiency-driven logics and long-term talent development. Together, these works provide a foundation for my interest in how institutional structures and discourses shape career progression for high-performing academic leaders in management education.

Research Questions:

1. To what extent are high-performing academic leaders in management education disadvantaged in career progression due to their perceived irreplaceability?
2. How do line managers and senior leaders justify or rationalise the decision to retain rather than promote individuals in key roles?
3. What institutional mechanisms and HR practices support or hinder transparent and fair promotion pathways for those with significant leadership responsibilities?
4. How does this dynamic affect motivation, retention, and long-term strategic development within business schools?

Significance of this topic:
Research in this area will contribute to the literature on academic leadership, career trajectories, and the management of talent within higher education. It also has important implications for equity and organisational justice in universities. While the value of effective leadership is widely recognised, this topic raises a critical and under-explored question: *At what point does being 'indispensable' become a barrier rather than a benefit in academic careers?* Outputs from this research could inform the development of more transparent and equitable promotion policies, improve succession planning, and support sustainable leadership development pathways in higher education.

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Can using a 'coaching approach' in teaching enhance student engagement?

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Questions and ideas
In many classrooms, even when the topic is interesting and relevant, students often seem to be disengaged, reluctant to speak up, hiding behind their laptops. The more confident students find their voice, but many remain silent.

What more can we do to maximise their level of engagement?
I am interested in exploring whether a coaching-style pedagogy can enhance engagement: shifting classroom experience from a pedagogy focussed on content delivery and 'measuring' students' learning to a more facilitated experience where students achieve personal development aligned with educational objectives.

Can we create teaching spaces where students listen actively, ask open questions, have time for reflection and set their own goals?
How might this work? One idea is to use the coaching GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, Way forward). For a particular topic/class, you might discuss with the students:

- Goal: 'What would you like to understand / be able to demonstrate by the end of this class?'
- Reality: 'Where are you now with this topic? What are the challenges to your understanding?'
- Options: 'How can we work in groups to discuss this issue further?'
- Way forward: 'What will you do after class to build on what you have learned?'

Students are encouraged to actively think about what and how they are learning, what support they need, how the class might run. This approach helps the students to take ownership of their learning and encourages accountability for their after-class learning. There is similarity with the principles of co-creation, but here the underpinning feature of the pedagogy is the creation of a coach/coachee style relationship between the lecturer/students.

A coaching approach in education is not about being 'softer' on the students. Some students may find this style of learning uncomfortable. Students need to understand 'what's in it for them' so they are encouraged to embrace an active role in their learning.

Concerns/further questions:
- Would a coaching approach work equally well for all subjects, or does it suit some disciplines better than others?
- Do students who are accustomed to 'traditional', directive teaching respond positively, or does the unfamiliarity create resistance or even anxiety?
- How much does cultural background influence a student's willingness to speak openly, challenge ideas, or embrace responsibility for learning?
- How does the lecturer balance the need for delivering content with facilitated discussion?
- Is there evidence that a coaching approach leads to measurable improvements in student engagement or learning outcomes?
- Are we assuming that the quiet students who fail to actively participate are 'not engaged' with their learning?
- What professional development or institutional support would be required to help faculty build and sustain these skills?
- What are the benefits of this approach for educators?

Research can help us to understand whether this approach can be of benefit to students. Literature exists on coaching as a pedagogy in sports or vocational education and there are a few studies into the use of coaching in executive level business education – but even here, the focus is usually on the benefits of teaching coaching techniques to learners, not on coaching as an embedded pedagogic device.

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How can Instructors Enhance Student Engagement and Mitigate Free Riding in Intercultural Virtual Group Work?

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Intercultural virtual group work is increasingly used in business education to prepare students for a multicultural global workplace. There are numerous examples of small-scale collaborations among faculty from different institutions that place their students in intercultural virtual teams that work on collaborative projects. A notable example of large-scale international collaboration is the X-Culture Project (Taras et al., 2013), which places students in global virtual teams that work on real-life business challenges collaboratively. X-Culture holds great promise for helping students develop their intercultural competence, as it connects hundreds of courses and faculty and thousands of students from all over the world every year.

Although there is wide recognition of the learning value of such projects, working in intercultural (virtual) student teams is fraught with challenges, including communication breakdowns, dysfunctional team dynamics, different levels of English language proficiency, differing standards and extensive free riding (Poort et al., 2019; Román-Calderón et al., 2021). Whereas dealing with such challenges may be considered part of student learning, free riding prevents students from engaging with their diverse peers and, hence, undermines the learning outcomes of such collaborative projects. In the context of an ongoing study, I have interviewed 48 faculty from 19 countries participating in X-Culture, and free riding was mentioned as a major challenge for their students in virtually every single interview.

As an X-Culture participant and following my participation in similar small-scale collaborations in the past, I have witnessed many students struggling to connect with their peers, very often in vain, and their disillusionment when they realize that their aspirations to work collaboratively in global teams will not materialize. As their instructor, I feel guilty for not being able to offer these students the learning experience they are promised. Since my first participation in X-Culture, I have kept asking myself the question what we, as instructors, can do to change this situation and engage our students in intercultural virtual group work meaningfully. Although there is a lot of research on global virtual teams including free riding in such contexts (e.g., Tavoletti et al., 2019), there seems to be limited attention to the role of instructors in stimulating student engagement and mitigating free riding in global virtual teams.

Based on the above, I am intrigued by the following management education research question:

> *Which course design decisions, teaching and learning practices and assessment strategies are conducive to higher student engagement and lower free riding in intercultural virtual group work?*

The overarching goal of such inquiry is to develop a guiding framework for instructors interested in participating in international collaborations making use of global virtual teams. At a time of increasing geopolitical divides, educational initiatives that bring students from different cultures together in the pursuit of meaningful learning goals are important to establish bridges that connect people and promote intercultural understanding. To this end, exploring instructional practices that enhance the learning value of such initiatives is both meaningful and necessary.

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How to support teaching focused colleagues to develop their scholarship in management learning and education.

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Inspired by conversations at RMLE 2025 our question is around *how to build scholarship in management learning and education?*

Scholarly publishing is a contested and situated social practice (Lillis and Scott, 2015), requiring specialist language, skills, and knowledge which are acquired through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Mentoring is an example of how learning can be supported through social practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Within academic institutions mentoring has been described (Angelique et al., 2002) as a continuum from the traditional mode at one end, where expertise is provided by a more experienced and established colleague, (Stalker, 1994) to peer mentoring at the other (Parker et al., 2008). Several studies highlight the value of mentoring provided by a more experienced colleague, (Bice et al., 2022; Muschallik and Pull, 2016) with others pointing to the benefits of peer mentoring (Merga and Mason, 2021).

Teaching intensive or education focused (EF) contracts are a relatively new phenomena – in response to the high teaching load in business schools many institutions have developed a reliance on teaching-focused staff to service students per (Black and Roberts, 2024). This has resulted in an 80 per cent increase in teaching-only staff between 2005/06 and 2018/19, with only a 16 per cent in teaching and research staff over the same period, with a particular growth in the Russell Group universities in the UK (Wolf and Jenkins, 2021). Although the move to education focused roles can be seen as a positive step to improve teaching (Loch et al., 2024), it is also s a route by which to remove under-performing research-focused staff and to save money.

Given the increased number of teaching intensive roles in our institutions, we are interested in how they might be supported to develop scholarship outcomes that improve their practice, their job satisfaction and their career progression. **Our particular interest** is in the potential role of coaching and mentoring to support them. While there are some distinctions between coaching and mentoring, both are likely to promote personal, as well as professional growth (Gimson and Clutterbuck, 2008). Mentoring typically involves an organisational or sector-specific colleague (usually but not necessarily more experienced) whereas a coach is likely to be external and paid for by the employing organisation (Cleary and Horsfall, 2015). Previous studies have confirmed an increase in confidence amongst academics as a result of decisions made in coaching meetings (Carmel and Paul, 2015; Mcculloch and Mora, 2024) whilst also highlighting the importance of this being self-directed by the individual, not imposed by the institution.

Our **concerns include various sector-wide issues**

- That the scholarship 'outcomes' expected of EF staff require more clarity and standardization
- Promotion criteria remain unconsolidated across the sector
- Education focused staff are more likely to work part time (UCU, 2021) and if they enter academia from industry may not have a PhD – making the transition to scholarly publishing more challenging

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Changing Career Lanes: A Perception of Identity?

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In the autumn-stage of my career, and in seeking promotion, I decided to switch from a 'Research and Teaching' track to a 'Teaching-focused' track. This generated mixed feelings about my sense of professional identity given I had been a research-active academic for over 30 years. As some of my research publications have had a pedagogic focus and I remain passionate about disciplinary issues that impact teaching, I believed the switch would allow me to focus on things that I truly care about. The switch however, brought changes. Internally, I was now labelled as 'Teaching-focused' and this brought a heavier teaching load that leaves much less time for any research, be it pedagogic or otherwise. In the transition period, I felt a slight struggle with my sense of identity – on a good day, I was a closet Teaching-focused academic who had been denying their true vocation for many years due to potentially untrue perceptions of what it meant to be Teaching-focused….on a bad day, I could feel like a somewhat failed researcher.

My experience sits within a wider context and trend sweeping through academia in the UK and beyond. In the UK, HESA statistics show that the proportion of academic staff on Education-focused (or Teaching only) contracts has jumped from 26% in 2015 to 36 % in 2023/24, whilst the proportion with research in their contract has shrunk from 73% to 63% over the same period (see; https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/28-01-2025/sb270-higher-education-staff-statistics). Smith and Walker (2022: 193) suggest that the growth in Teaching-focused academics has been driven by increasing student numbers and 'perceived managerialist agendas'. Previous research has explored the views of two key stakeholder groups: Teaching-focused academics (Bull et al., 2025) and faculty/departmental deans (Black and Roberts, 2024; Anderson and Mallanaphy, 2020). Two key themes emerging from this research include: The lack of knowledge of, and agreement about, what constitutes a Teaching-focused academic role; and the variability across the sector in the treatment of career paths and progression for Teaching-focused academics.

In reflecting on my experiences, I would be interested to hear the experiences of others on the following ideas:

- What is impact on the sense of professional identify for an academic making the transition to a Teaching-focused track and how does this compare with those who have joined this track from the start of their career? How are individuals supported in making this transition?
- How does the development of a Teaching-focused career impact the identity of those academics on pathways that combine both Teaching and Research?
- How are Teaching-focused academics supported in conducting scholarship-focused research activities? What support is offered to help balance this with the other role commitments?
- Are promotion criteria across tracks equitable? In my own institution the university's criteria for promotion appear tougher for those on a Teaching track, notably at the Professorial level.

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RESEARCH IN MANAGEMENT LEARNING & EDUCATION
unConference

RMLE Unconference (Un)schedule - Thursday, January 8, 2026

TIME	ACTIVITIES	LOCATION
8:00am-9:00am	Event sign-in, meet and greet and refreshments at (Address: Warwick Venice Centre, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, San Marco 2893, Venezia 30124, Italy).	Registration and welcome refreshments will be offered at your Palazzo! We have the whole second floor for our time together, this can be accessed via the stairs or a lift.
9:00am-9:15am	Welcome to the 12th RMLE Unconference held in collaboration with our dear friends at Warwick Business School.	Warwick Venice Centre
9:15am-11:00am	Group Discussions: Session 1	Warwick Venice Centre
11:00am-11:15am	Morning tea	Warwick Venice Centre
11:15am-12:00pm	Idea Sharing: Record and Review of Session 1	Warwick Venice Centre
12:00pm-2:30pm	Working Lunch in Discussion Groups: Session 2 Continue in discussions following lunch together	Warwick Venice Centre
2:30pm-3:30pm	Idea Sharing: Record and Review of Session 2	Warwick Venice Centre
3:30pm-4:00pm	Transfer to Mercati di Rialto (Rialto Market)	(this will be outside so please have a jacket with you)
4:00pm-5:00pm	Continue conversations as we head to and around Mercati di Rialto (Rialto Market) for a guided tour that will uncover its important place in global economics. This will be followed by a narrated tour of Ponte di Rialto (Rialto Bridge) with *the* leading international Professor in Venetian history	Mercati di Rialto (Rialto Market) Ponte di Rialto (Rialto Bridge) (this is also outside)
5:00pm-5:30pm	Transfer to Private Restaurant	Osteria Al Cantinon https://osterialcantinon.it/en/
5:30pm - 6.30pm	Welcome aperitivo at the restaurant	Osteria Al Cantinon
6:30pm – 9:30pm	Working Dinner for all participants at Osteria Al Cantinon	Osteria Al Cantinon
9.30pm	Transportation provided to Hilton Molino Stucky and The Warwick Venice Centre	

RMLE Unconference (Un)schedule
Friday, January 9, 2026

TIME	ACTIVITIES	LOCATION
8:00am – 8:45am	Excitement Resurgence & Tea/Coffee refreshments	Warwick Venice Centre
8:45am – 9:00am	Welcome to Day 2: Let's Jump Back In!	Warwick Venice Centre
9:00am – 11:30am	Unconference Group Discussion: Session 5 Time to Refine Ideas and Create Action Plans	Warwick Venice Centre
11:30am – 12:30pm	Lunch is served and conversations continue	Warwick Venice Centre
12:30pm – 1:30pm	Final Sharing of Ideas, Action Plans, and Overall Impressions: Wrapping Up Our 1.5 Amazing Days Together	Warwick Venice Centre

A heartfelt special "thank you" to our ongoing partner organizations, the *Journal of Management Education*, *Management Learning*, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, and Bond University, and to the truly wonderful organizing team of faculty and staff at this year's host institution, Warwick Business School of The University of Warwick. Thank you!

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